



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ON A BOULDER WITH PRESUMED PAGAN CARVINGS AT CLONFINLOUGH, KING'S COUNTY.

BY THE REV. JAMES GRAVES, A.B., M.R.I.A.

THE attention of archæologists has been of late much fixed on presumed primæval incised markings, or carvings, found on the surfaces of natural rocks in these islands, examples of which, occurring in Argyleshire, have been engraved in our "Journal," Vol. IV., new series, p. 382. An oral communication was addressed to the Royal Irish Academy by Dean Graves, in February, 1860, in which he described certain rock-carvings occurring in Ireland, and propounded a theory to explain their meaning. ("Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy," vol. vii., pp. 276-7); but as the communication has not, it is to be regretted, been printed as yet *in extenso*, those who did not enjoy the good fortune to be present at its delivery have no means of judging whether the rock carvings discovered by Dr. Graves are similar, or even analogous, to those occurring in Scotland and the North of England.

Irish archæologists have long been familiar with markings extant, not, it is true, on the surface of the natural rock *in situ*, but yet so far, in this respect, analogous to those just alluded to, as that they are found carved on the weatherworn and undressed surfaces of boulder stones used in the construction of the passages and chambers found within Irish sepulchral mounds, and notably in the great mounds of New Grange and Dowth, on the Boyne. These markings present characteristics readily distinguishing them from the rock markings of the North of England, and Scotland: one of the chief of which is that whilst the circular incised figures, which form the bulk of the latter, are concentric with a central cup-like hollow, and a channel passing through the concentric circles, the carvings at New Grange and Dowth are as a rule spirals,¹ without the central hollow or intersecting channel, and are associated with fern-leaf patterns, and also with lozenge, zigzag, and chevron-like markings, which are analogous to the ornamentation of the fictile sepulchral vessels occurring in these islands, generally supposed to be Celtic, and the massive penannular rings and flat *lunulae* of fine gold, so many examples of which have been found in Ireland. By the kindness of Messrs. M'Glashan and Gill, I am enabled to present to the reader, in the accompanying Plates, some of the illustrations which accompany Sir William Wilde's description (the best

¹ The exceptions to this rule are seen in the occurrence of some few concén-

tric circular markings, but without the central cup and channel.

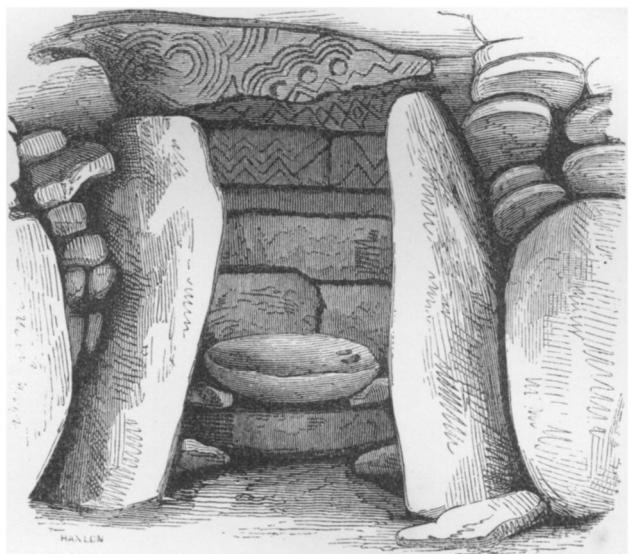


Fig. 1.

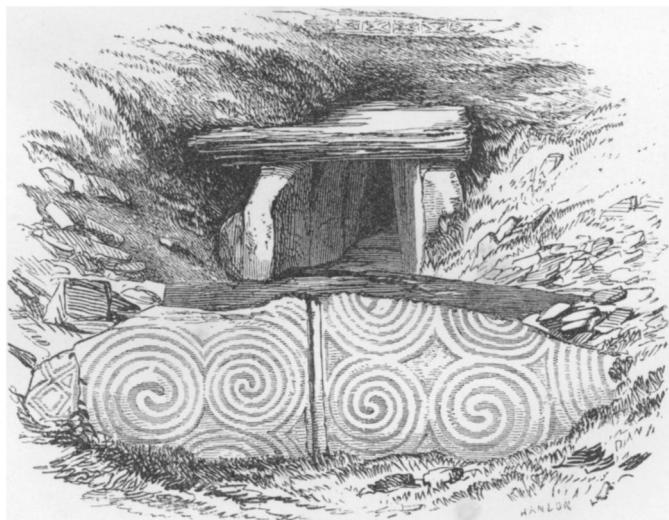


Fig. 2.

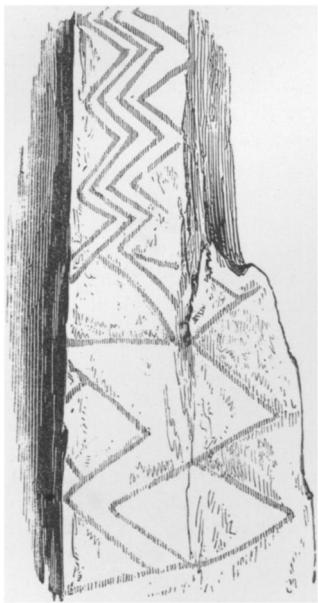


Fig. 3.

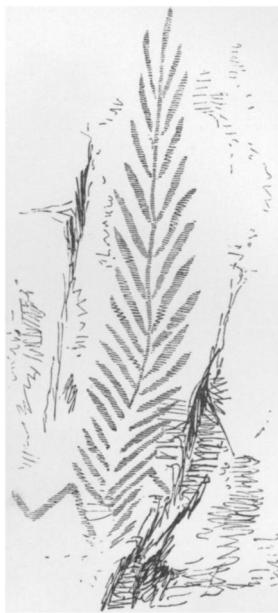


Fig. 4.

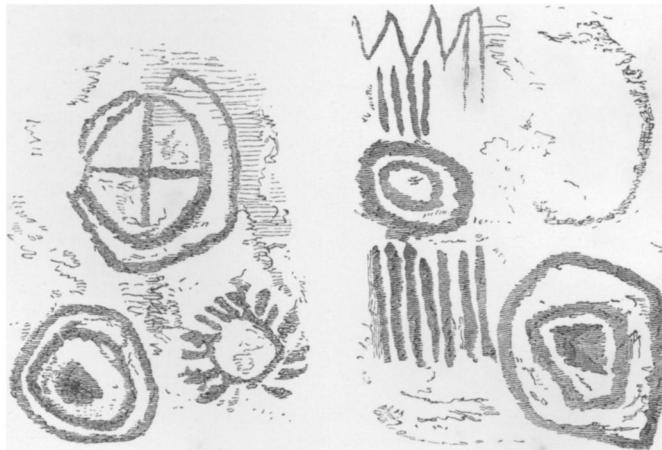


Fig. 5.

SCULPTURES AT NEW GRANGE AND DOWTH, CO. MEATH.

and fullest extant), of New Grange and Dowth, in his "Beauties of the Boyne and Blackwater," pp. 189-204. Of these, Plate I., figs. 1-2, represent the present entrance, and the eastern recess of the central chamber of New Grange. Plate II., fig. 3, represents chevron carvings from the western portion of the interior of the same; and fig. 4, one of the fern-leaf markings from the western recess. But the most singular thing about these carvings, and one that bears somewhat more directly on the subject of the present paper, is, that they seem, in some instances at least, not to have been originally made for the purpose of ornamenting the great sepulchral structure¹ in which they are now found, as is proved by the occurrence of the markings on the surfaces of the stones now concealed from view, and this in portions where it would be impossible to carve them after the erection of the structure.² In corroboration of my own experience I may quote Sir William Wilde's observations on the subject.

"We found," he says, "that these carvings not only covered portions of the stones exposed to view, but extended over those surfaces which, until some recent dilapidation, were completely concealed from view, and where a tool could not have reached them; and the inference is plain, that these stones were carved prior to their being placed in their present position, perhaps were used for some anterior purpose. If so, how much it adds to their antiquity! . . . The eastern jamb of the chamber opposite the entrance has fallen inwards, and recently exposed a portion of the under surface of a great flag, which is now, for the first time since the erection of the building, exposed to view. This flag has, like most of the other stones here, a sort of skin, or brownish outer polish, as if water-washed. Now, in all the exposed carvings upon the other stones, the indentures have assumed more or less of the dark colour and polish around; whereas in this one the colour of the cutting and track of the tool³ is just as fresh as if done but yesterday."—*Beauties of the Boyne*, &c., pp. 199-200.

In the neighbouring mound of Dowth the stones forming the chambers are also full of carvings, some of them of a similar character, and many also on the concealed surfaces of the stones. Sir William Wilde observes, however, that—

"Many of the carvings, . . . differ somewhat from those at New Grange. We find here . . . a number of wheel-like ornaments and concentric circles, and others with lines radiating from a point; while some very much resemble the Ogham character, consisting of short straight parallel lines."—*Id.*, p. 207.

¹ In some recent numbers of "The Builder" the theory is put forward that New Grange was intended for magical rites; or, as the writer expressed it, was a "Sorcery Hall." It is not worth while losing space to refute this baseless theory.

² This peculiarity is observable in the

carvings on analogous structures in Brittany. See covering stone, Table des Marchands, engraved by Mr. Ferguson, "Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy," vol. viii., Plate xxviii.

³ The "track of the tool" here alluded to, proves it to have been a pointed instrument, like a millstone pick.

The foregoing are almost the only examples of carved megalithic chambers known to Irish antiquaries up to the year 1864, when a new light of the most important kind broke on the archæological world. The credit of this discovery is entirely due to Mr. E. A. Conwell, of Trim, a member of the Royal Irish Academy, and also of our own Society—a most indefatigable student of the past. But I shall best lay before the Members the account of this startling find¹ by quoting a portion of a letter communicated to "The Meath Herald" of 21st October, 1865, by Mr. G. V. Du Noyer, M. R. I. A., who has been present with Mr. Conwell in most of his subsequent explorations of the tumuli, and whose accurate and facile pencil has pourtrayed them, both internally and externally.² It runs as follows:—

"Slieve-na-Caillighe, or the Hill of the Hag or Witch, comprises the range of hills, which attain to nearly 1000 feet in height, overlooking the demesne of Loughcrew and the plains of Clonabreany from the north, and the valley of the River Blackwater, for the distance of about six miles to the east of Oldcastle, from the south. This ridge consists of three well-defined summits, the most westerly being known as Cairn Bane. These summits are occupied by groups of ancient Celtic Pagan sepulchral cairns, each containing chambers formed by large flags set on edge and rough pillar stones, principally of sandstone and calcarious grit. Originally each of these was roofed in by large slabs of dry masonry, the stones overlapping each other till a rude beehive-formed chamber was constructed, the dome being closed in by a single flagstone. Access to these chambers was by a narrow passage, roofed with flat stones, and usually facing to the east. When the dome and passage were completed, the whole was covered up so as to form a large conical mound of broken stones, around the outer base of which rows of large flags were placed on end, thus forming a rude pyramid, visible for miles around.

"During the early part of last year the attention of Eugene Conwell, Esq., M. R. I. A., of Trim, was directed to these cairns; accordingly, at the expenditure of much private time, and of labour that a less energetic person would have shrunk from, he explored the mountain, and kindly reported to me that he had discovered a Celtic necropolis in the county of Meath. After many days spent in almost unaided researches in two of the cairns whose chambers had been exposed, Mr. Conwell succeeded in making rubbings of nineteen carved stones, and rough plans of the

¹ Even on the Townland six-inch Ordnance Map of the district the surveyors did not mark these primæval remains. It evidently seems as if no one had the curiosity to examine the groups of cairns, till Mr. Conwell discovered them.

² It is, I understand, the intention of Messrs. Conwell and Du Noyer to offer the results of their joint labours to the Royal Irish Academy. I feel sure that national body will see the great impor-

tance of affording the full illustrations which such a work imperatively requires. But if it unfortunately happens that the funds placed at the Academy's disposal are too small to enable it to do so, I trust these gentlemen will appeal to the public. I feel quite certain that the archæologists of Great Britain and Ireland would give ample support to any project calculated to make worthily known this most important discovery.

various groups of cairns on the three summits; with these materials in hand, he read papers on the subject before the Royal Irish Academy in May and November, 1864, parts of which were published in their 'Proceedings;' and thus the interesting discovery he had made became generally known to the archaeological world.

"With an enthusiasm that deserves all praise, Mr. Conwell, not satisfied with the partial exploration of what he then knew to be a mine of pre-historic antiquarian wealth, brought the matter prominently before the lord of the soil, James Lennox Naper, Esq., D.L., of Loughcrew; and he found no difficulty in enlisting the enlightened sentiments of that gentleman to bring to its proper conclusion the work thus happily begun, by a systematic exploration of every tumulus on the range of Slieve-na-Caillighe. Mr. Naper's agent, Charles W. Hamilton, Esq.—a gentleman well known to science—was at once communicated with, and the work of exploration was shortly afterwards commenced. In the month of August last, Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Conwell, and myself visited the place, and with Mr. Naper a plan of operations was decided on. In the following month Mr. Conwell undertook to inspect as many men as Mr. Naper would supply for the work, and see that the cairns were carefully opened, the contents of the central chambers cleared out, and any relics of antiquity which they might contain, secured.

"British archaeologists owe their thanks to Mr. Naper for giving such material aid to the interesting work now so admirably completed; and—I write it advisedly—*the antiquarian tourist may now study a series of Celtic sepulchral remains, which, in point of magnificence, number, and quaint ornamentation, surpass anything of the kind as yet discovered in Western Europe.*

"In plan the chambers are for the most part cruciform, the shaft representing the entrance passage, and the termination of the arms, the small cists, from four to five feet square, arranged around the central chamber, which in one instance (at the Chair cairn) is octagonal. Almost invariably the mouth of the passage faces from E. to E. S. E., and its position is marked by one or more large flagstones, placed at the outer periphery of the circle in such a way as to cut off a portion of it—a peculiarity of structure which was first noticed by Mr. Conwell.

"The strange style of ornamentation observable on many of the chambers or cists is apparently of three kinds—punched work, chiselled work, and scraped work (the first being the most common, and the last very unusual); and, though the carved stones exceed one hundred in number, there are not two decorations alike!

"In the cists which have been long exposed to the destruction of the atmosphere, the punched or other work is often much obliterated; but in those lately opened the ornamentations are as fresh as at the hour the rude Celt departed with superstitious awe from the gloomy death chamber of his chief or king, and thanked his deity that the work was done with all honour to the mighty dead, and praise to the skilful architect and cunning sculptor.

"The ornamentation may be thus described:—Small circles, with or without a central dot; two or many more concentric circles; a small circle with a central dot, surrounded by a spiral line; the single spiral; the double spiral, or two spirals starting from different centres; rows of small lozenges

and ovals; stars of six to thirteen rays; wheels of nine rayes; flower ornaments, sometimes enclosed in a circle or wide oval; wave-like lines; groups of lunet-shaped lines; pothooks; small squares attached to each other side by side, so as to form a reticulated pattern; small attached concentric circles; large and small hollows; a cup hollow surrounded by one or more circles; lozenges crossed from angle to angle (these and the squares produced by scrapings); an ornament like the spine of a fish with the ribs attached, or the fibre system of some leaf; short equi-armed crosses, starting sometimes from a dot and small circle, a circle with rays round it, and the whole contained in a circle; a series of compressed semicircles like the letters ΩΩΩΩ inverted; vertical lines far apart, with ribs sloping downwards from them like twigs; an ornament like the fibre system of a broad leaf, with the stem attached; rude concentric circles with short rays extending from part of the outer one; an ornament very like the simple Greek fret, with dots in the centre of the loop; fine zigzag lines, and two parallel lines, on each of which, and pointing towards each other, is a series of cones ornamented by lines radiating from the apex, crossed by others parallel to the base—this design has been produced by scraping, and I propose to call it the Patella ornament, as it strikingly resembles the large species of that shell so common on our coasts, and which shell Mr. Conwell discovered in numbers in some of the cists in connexion with fragments of pottery and human bones; a semicircle with three or four straight lines proceeding from it, but not touching it; a dot with several lines radiating from it; combinations of short straight lines arranged either at right angles to, or sloping from, a central line; an ω -shaped curve, each loop enclosing concentric circles; and a vast number of other combinations of the circle, spiral, line, and dot, which cannot be described in writing.

"When decorative carving such as I have described is attempted by any semicivilized people, as the builders of these sepulchral cairns must have been, we naturally expect to find amongst it some representation of objects commonly known or familiar to the builders, as well as indications of their particular kind of worship—and, if they had a written language, some of its letters: with this idea in view, I have drawn and studied all the carvings in question; and I think, if we allow a little play to our imagination, without asserting anything as positive, and willing at once to admit that mere probability is the strongest reason we can adduce for our suppositions, that, with reference to the object of their worship, we may regard the carving described as a circle surrounded by short rays and enclosed in a circle as representing the sun; the flower-like ornament, also enclosed either in a circle or oval, portraying the moon; whilst the numerous dots and hollows, more or less deep, indicated the stars; for I should hesitate to suppose that the figure by which we now symbolize a star was used by the rude Celtae of Pagan Ireland with the same signification as it had amongst the early Christians. To this ornament, therefore, we must attach some other meaning.

"It is remarkable that one of the groups of small hollows very closely resembles the constellation of the Plough—the similitude to which would be perfect if we omit one dot in the centre of what would be the southern side of the constellation, and suppose that the most westerly star was placed much too far to the north.

"In all rude Pagan nations we must expect that their religion would consist of two great elements, viz., the spiritual and the sensual; and, therefore, I was not surprised to find amongst these carvings what may possibly be emblems of Priapian import. With regard to letters, I find what I believe are short Oghamic inscriptions; and this is a point the determination of which is of the utmost importance, for up to the present the Ogham letter has been regarded as early Christian, while its occurrence here proves it to be Pagan. With reference to common objects, it is possible we may have the representation of the landing of a boat, with high poop and stern, against a cliff; the water is expressed by shallow scolloped lines, and the cliff by a single line passing beneath the scollops, and rising up in front of the boat. Another figure is like a deep wicker-work basket, with two slender handles, each ending in a loop; and another figure, which consists of a series of concentric lines, forming about two-thirds of the circle, and partially enclosing a small oval of two lines, would not inaptly represent an ancient wooden shield, like that preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, the small oval being the raised conical boss, while the concentric lines were the alternate concentric ridges and grooves with which the shield is ornamented.

"Another group of lunet-shaped lines might well be supposed to represent one of those gold torque or collar-like ornaments which are also in the Museum of the Academy. Another figure might be likened to a two-wheeled chariot, with a semicircular hood over it.

"I cannot detect the form of anything like a weapon, unless we suppose those small diamond patterns represent spears and arrow heads. . .

"With regard to the objects of high antiquarian interest which Mr. Conwell found during the course of his excavations, I shall leave them to him to describe—my object in putting together these remarks being a simple explanation of a most remarkable class of Celtic remains, the events which led to their discovery and exploration, and the part which I was fortunately enabled to take in the work.

"It is worthy of remark that some of the ancient British carvings on natural rock surfaces in Northumberland and the Eastern Borders are precisely similar to some of those discovered at Slieve-na-Caillighe; for example, the dot and circle, the incomplete concentric oval, the horse-shoe ornament, the simple dot, the Ω-shaped character, and several others."

A comparison of Mr. Du Noyer's description with the engraving from the mound at Dowth proves that the sculptures are cognate; but whether the Dowth and Slieve-na-Caillighe tumuli belong to a period earlier or later than that of the great mound of New Grange, remains to be proved. I should incline to the latter supposition myself, from the fact of the significance of the emblems being more easily guessed at.

Mr. Conwell has also discovered, within the last year, most interesting cognate carvings on the covering stone of a cromleac at Kathkenny, Co. Meath, an account of which Archæologists are eagerly expecting.

It will be remembered that many of the markings of New

Grange and Dowth are proved to have been carved before the stones were used for their present purpose. Now, if we find carvings on a natural boulder of unwrought stone, not in any way connected with a Christian use, or a Christian tradition, and not ostensibly intended to be used in any structure, although these carvings may not be strictly analogous to those at New Grange, Dowth, or Slieve-na-caillighe, yet we have some grounds to conclude that here is an example of a primæval custom which placed ready to the hand of the builders of these tumuli, materials ready carved, and possibly endowed with some kind of sanctity fitting them to do honour to a great chieftain's grave.

The example to which I allude is that of a natural boulder of arenaceous limestone, one of several studding the surface of one of those green eskers which form the characteristic feature of that portion of the King's County surrounding the Seven Churches of Clonmacnoise, swelling up like mounds of emerald from the sombre bosoms of the vast bogs which stretch away like seas to the distant horizon. The boulder which I am about to describe is situated close to the chapel of Clonfinlough, in the townland of the same name, and parish of Clonmacnoise. There is a small lake close at hand which gives its title to the townland, *i. e.*, the "cluain, or sheltered pasture, of the White Lake." On both sides of the Shannon in this neighbourhood Christian tradition is busy with almost every stone, boher, and tougher, and close to this boulder, on the old boher which led to the Seven Churches of Clonmacnoise before the present road was formed, is a carn called Leacht-na-Marra, or the Monument of the Dead, where, to the present day, when a funeral approaches that famed burial ground, the coffin is laid down, and stones thrown on the carn.¹ But I was distinctly informed that no Christian rite was ever performed at the Clonfinlough stone: on the contrary, the name by which it is known—"The Fairy's Stone"²—points to a Pagan origin. Another legend terms it "The Horseman's Stone," and tells that a horseman gallops round it at certain times.³ Mr. T. L. Cooke, of Parsonstown—who is intimately acquainted with all the antiquities of the locality, and who some time ago kindly communicated to me a drawing of this stone—

¹ The tradition is that in the old times some of the "holy men" from the Seven Churches always attended here, and carried the corpse to its last resting place, about two miles distant, the laity not being allowed to enter the sacred precincts. The carn-raising, however, is the remnant of a Pagan custom.

² Two remarkable earthworks, no mean engineering feats in their way, consisting each of a deep fosse and ram-

part drawn across the esker, not very far from this stone, are termed "The Witch's Hollows."

³ A similar legend is connected with a Pagan burial mound lately opened near Sliabh Kielta, Co. Wexford: long before it was known that a stone chamber containing two skeletons was enclosed by it, the peasantry used to tell of a horseman galloping round, and vanishing into the tumulus.

19 6 0 7 2 3 4 5

Scale of Feet

Fig. 1.



See T. Lanyon Dr. et L. M. May 1865

Fig. 2.

19 6 0 7 2 3 4 5

Scale of Feet

SCULPTURED BOULDER AT CLONFINLOUGH.
(KING'S COUNTY.)

appends to his sketch the Irish title *Una mópe*; but this name seems now forgotten—at least, I could not learn, during a recent visit of several weeks to the locality, that it was now known to be connected with the boulder in question.

The Clonfinlough boulder presents a flat surface, and is of irregular form; its extreme measurements being 9 ft. 9 in. by 8 ft. 3 in.; it slopes to the south, and at the western side the sward had grown over a portion of it. The other boulders occurring on the esker are studded over with cup-like hollows, evidently caused by the solvent property of rain water retained in certain natural irregularities, which were thereby deepened, and assumed the artificial aspect which they now present. The accompanying Plate, drawn accurately to scale by my friend Mr. G. V. Du Noyer, gives an excellent idea of the carvings which cover the entire of the surface of the “Fairy’s Stone;” and one cannot escape the impression that many of the cup-like hollows which enter into the several groups of carvings were the natural results of the lodgment of rain water, perhaps deepened, and in some cases others added to complete the figures; as, for instance, two resembling a sun with its attendant planets, and another bearing a striking likeness to the constellation of the Plough. In other cases these hollows have been connected by incised lines in the form of crosses¹; or taken advantage of to indicate the pommels of rudely marked daggers; or they have been elongated, and, by the connexion of two of them, made to resemble the impressions of the human foot,² of which several occur on the stone.³ But the most singular markings on the boulder are representations of the ancient Irish ring-brooch;⁴ some with a knob on top of the acus, as frequently occurs in extant specimens; others being flat at top, and

¹ Crossed lines are not necessarily Christian crosses. I believe that in this instance they have nothing to do with Christianity.

² These foot marks would seem to indicate that this boulder may have served as an inauguration stone at some remote period.

³ In the “Essai sur les Dolmens,” by the Baron de Bonstetten, Geneva, 1865, it is stated that “near to Vannes, in one of these sepulchral chambers discovered by M. Louis Galles, one of the upright slabs supporting the covering stone bears the effigy of two human feet as viewed from beneath; and at St. Sulpice-sur-Rille (department of the Orne), a supporting stone of a Dolmen has three small crosses incised on it (‘gravé en creux’), and arranged in a triangle.” These facts are singularly interesting, as bearing on the question of the migration of early races

from central Europe, and, when taken in conjunction with other facts, point to a certain connexion between the primitive races of Europe more wide-spread than we have hitherto been inclined to suppose.—G. V. D.

⁴ Carvings of personal ornaments and arms are not uncommon on primeval monuments. Mr. Du Noyer has identified representations of our gold lunets on the Slieabh-na-Caillighe tumuli; and Mr. Samuel Ferguson has engraved in the eighth volume of the “Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy” (pp. 398-405, and 451-455), the representations of shields and stone hatchets, carved on the stones of the primeval sepulchral monuments of Mane Nelud, Butte de Caesar, and Table des Marchands, at Locmariaker, and the tumulus in l’Isle Longue, Sea of Morbihan, Brittany.

seeming to represent the looping of the acus over the flat bar of a half-moon ring. Of both these classes specimens will be seen in the enlarged representation of a portion of the surface of the stone given on the Plate, whilst other instances will also be found on the left side of the general view. It only remains for me to add, that the carvings appear to have been formed by a rude pointed tool or pick, and are on an average about an inch deep.

I am not myself aware of the existence of any other example analogous to the Clonfinlough stone; but Mr. Cooke has sent me a sketch of an incised stone near Cranna, Co. Galway, called by the peasantry *Cloch a Síg tóraíthea* or the "stone of the fruitful fairy." This Fairy stone is a boulder of very irregular form, measuring 46 inches by 32 inches; it presents the waterworn hollows already described, but they are of a larger size; one or two well marked dagger-like figures, and crosses similar to those represented in the Plate, occur on this stone. There are also V-shaped markings, but no footmarks or ring-brooch carvings.

Thomas Dineley, in his "Irish Tour," made in the reign of Charles II., now in course of publication in our "Journal," states (p. 272, *supra*), that a stone near Birr, or Parsonstown, was called the "Navel of Ireland." Mr. Cooke supplied a note (p. 289) on this statement of Dineley's, to the effect that at the spot indicated by Dineley, *i.e.* about a quarter of a mile from Parsonstown, on the road to Dublin, there stood, about thirty years ago, a globular-shaped limestone boulder, about five or six feet in diameter, inscribed with V-shaped marks, like the stones at Cranna, Co. Galway, and at Glenacummer, in the same county, and with crosses similar to the Pagan rock at Clonfinlough; also various depressions or cavities—traditionally said to be the marks of Fin Mac Coul's thumb and fingers. It was called Sheffin or Seefin, *i.e.* Fin's Seat. This stone was removed from its ancient site (near the present Railway Terminus), by the late Thomas Steele (Daniel O'Connell's "Head Pacifier"), on a truck drawn by eight horses, to Cullawn, near Tulla, in the County of Clare, where it is still believed to be. If extant, I should be glad of a notice and description of it.

I have thus placed before the Members some hasty notes on this most interesting subject. That other sculptured stones similar to those now under consideration exist in Ireland, is very probable; and I would fain hope that the chief benefit to be derived from these few remarks of mine may be the directing the attention of the Members to their existence, and the placing on record descriptions or drawings of them, for the purpose of intelligent comparison with those already known to Irish archæologists.